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ABSTRACT

When undertaking the tasks of change and planning in a rural area, educational management must consider the interrelated variables of what, why, when, how, where, who, and how well re: any given change. The goals and objectives (what and why) in a rural system are greatly influenced by the community's climate of opinion, economic condition, ethnic/cultural character, and political orientation. When determining the specificity of the "when" to "how well" process (planning/timing; process strategies; organization/structure; roles/tasks; and evaluation/feedback), every consideration must be given to the human and natural resources available. The questions of how and where are extremely difficult, for the change agent in a rural school system often has little control over the problems of size, space, physical plant, time, personnel, and resources. The most important change process commodity is time, for if the change agent does not provide sufficient time to organize, plan, develop, implement, evaluate, and revise a program, it cannot gain a broad based support and without support will lack stability and fail. Given the closeness of a small rural community, a successful change agent must engage in the kind of direct involvement that leads to adoption, vested interest, commitment, internalization, and ultimately intrinsic motivation. (JC)

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THE PROCESSES OF CHANGING AND PLANNING THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN RURAL SYSTEMS

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ALL educational systems, whether large or small - urban or rural, take direction and substance from several sectors of society. There are basic socially accepted mores, norms, and values that are seen as the responsibility of the schooling process to instill in students.

When undertaking the tasks of change and planning, educational management must consider several interrelated variables.

WHAT is to be done?	GOALS
WHY is it to be done?	OBJECTIVES
WHEN is it to be done?	PLANNING/TIMING
HOW is it to be done?	PROCESS/STRATEGIES
WHERE is it to be done?	ORGANIZATION/ STRUCTURE
WHO is to do it?	ROLES/TASKS
HOW WELL was it done?	EVALUATION/FEEDBACK

WHAT and WHY? The goals and objectives of the schooling process in a rural system are greatly effected and determined by forces far removed from the realm of education. School boards, parent groups, special interest groups, social organizations, governmental agencies and the courts effect the character and nature of the educational philosophy and program of a given school or system. Educational systems in both rural and urban settings must therefore take direction from external forces which not only dictate change but control the purse strings - and greatly determine how that change will occur.

The climate of opinion, the economic condition(s), the ethnic and cultural character, and the political thought of a given community - at any given point in time - will greatly determine the content and structure of the schooling process - as well as its philosophy and purpose.

From WHEN to HOW WELL? Once the determination has been made that something will happen, it then becomes the responsibility of those in the field of education to see to it that something will, in fact, happen.

When determining the specificity of the WHEN to HOW WELL process, consideration must be given to the human and natural resources at hand. In a rural community, consideration must be given to those community people and resources which can be employed in an attempt to enrich the instructional program that exists within the school. For example, in the area of vocational training, both community people and physical plant facilities can be used for purposes of providing students with on-the-job training experiences. When looking at the instructional staff and system, the educational planner or change agent must ask relevant questions of himself and others.

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the individual members and the collective staff?
2. Are the necessary personnel and resources available to do the tasks at hand?
3. What is the situation regarding the availability and utilization of instructional and supportive hardware/software?
4. Are adequate financial resources available for the purpose of implementing the process of change which is desired?

The questions of HOW? and WHERE? are, in many instances, the most difficult to address oneself to - and to answer. The reason for this difficulty is that the educational change agent in a rural school system is confronted with matters of physical plant size, space, time, personnel, and resources; variables over which he/she has little, if any, control or influence.

TIME. In many instances of program change and/or planning in rural systems, time is the most critical element in the processes of organization and implementation. TIME is the one commodity that cannot be manipulated. It can be rationed - but cannot be condensed or expanded. TIME is a constant; that is to say that a second...is a second...is a second! There is no way by which an interval of time, e.g., second, minute, hour or day, can be changed. It can only be used - wisely.

The most important change process commodity is TIME. If the change agent does not provide sufficient time for:

- organizing
- planning
- affecting attitudinal and behavioral changes
- developing
- implementing
- evaluating
- revising ... then the tried and tested change process which includes the stages of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing cannot occur. Without adequate time, a program cannot gain broadbased support. Without support, a program cannot have stability. Without stability, a program cannot survive.

A MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR THE RURAL SCHOOL CHANGE AGENT.

For the successful change agent, it is wise to keep in mind the fact that direct involvement generally results in adoption - at a personal level. Adoption, in turn, leads to vested interest which, in turn, leads to commitment. The ultimate goal is internalization - resulting in intrinsic motivation.

The change agent must see to it that people are directly involved in the processes of decision making and change.

One of the unique characteristics of rural communities is the factor of proximity. There is a closeness about a rural community that can be found nowhere else. In a large city there is developed an impersonal atmosphere among people. In the city, life goes on from day-to-day in a mechanical, dehumanized manner. In a small rural community, everyone knows everyone else and the atmosphere is one of friendship and caring for others.

Because of this closeness found within a rural community, the change agent must make sure that he/she involves lay people as well as system staff members in the decision making process.

The skillful change agent must assess the talents of each and every staff member with whom he/she works and must utilize their talents when most advantageous to the successful completion of a given task. The change agent must have the innate ability to assess and measure the strengths and weaknesses of each individual and to commit those evaluations and impressions to memory. As alluded to by Mazur[1] and Lopez[2], the educational change agent must not make unrealistic administrative demands of the staff or else his/her efforts are doomed to failure.

The educational change agent must perceive staff members as resource people whom he/she can employ in the processes of decision making and change - when their individual and collective expertise and experience(s) are applicable to the task at hand.

The same SOP should be followed when dealing with community people. The change agent must be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of those from within the community whom he/she wishes to directly involve in the change and/or planning processes.

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[1] Reference to Joseph Mazur, "Operationalizing Accountability in Public School Systems".

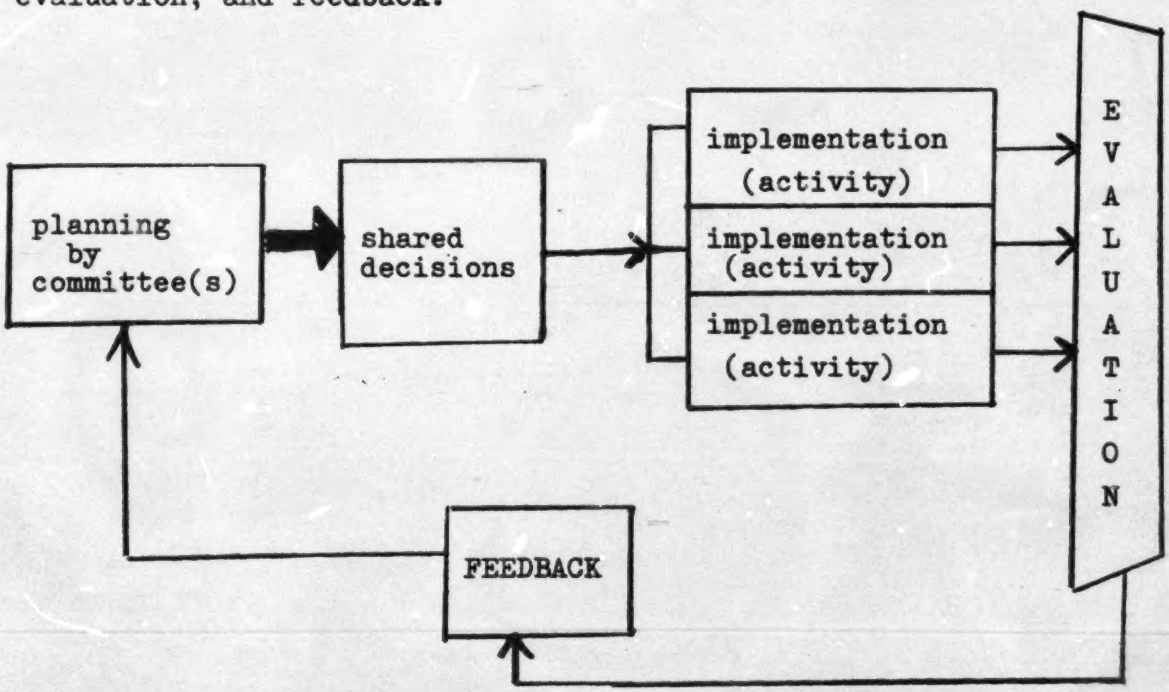
[2] Reference to Feliz Lopez, "Accountability in Education".

CONTACT.

When dealing with a diverse group of abilities and interests such as those which the change agent is confronted with on a day-to-day basis, there is a need to bring people together; to provide them with the opportunity to meet - to express themselves- to gain exposure to the feelings and values of others, and then to dircetly participate in the processes of compromise and shared decision making.

Committees can serve a useful purpose! If managed properly, the committee is a good vehicle for bringing people together. In a rural setting, to be successful the committee membership must be representative of the diverse interests and views of **all** parties interested in a particular issue. Only by allowing all interests and views to be represented and expressed can the change agent hope to achieve mutual understanding and respect. The foundation of mutual understanding and respect can lead to the disposition of differences and result in shared decisions.

The educational change agent becomes directly involved in the HOW WELL? loop model process which features implementation, evaluation, and feedback.



Accomplishing mutual understanding and shared decisions is only part of the process of change. There is a need for evaluation of shared decisions and follow-up/feedback to those who were directly involved in the formulation of decisions.

In rural communities, the degree of accountability that is discussed herein may be looked upon by townspeople as foolish or dangerous. Therefore, there is a need for the change agent to become knowledgable about diverse avenues of communication and familiar with media devices and techniques. Thus, the change agent must become a public relations person and a disseminator of information; one who is available to the several publics which make up a rural community. The change agent must be well-versed in and knowledgable about all aspects of a given issue in order that he/she can intelligently and adequately respond to inquiries and to provide sufficient information to those who seek knowledge for purposes of issues clarification and personal decision making.

SUMMARY STATEMENT.

Members of the educational change and/or planning team are part of a total process referred to herein as schooling. These specialized administrators must work with staff members and community people and must be keenly aware of and sensitive to their individual and collective strengths and weaknesses - as well as their desires and needs.

The change agent must be a manipulator of individuals who possess abilities and expertise that can be applied to situations for purposes of task accomplishment. His/her task goals and objectives must be realistic and attainable by self and others.

The change agent must develop and be directly involved in the process of information dissemination and feedback to those who have directly participated in the processes of decision making and change.